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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MUNICH 000063

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/13/2018

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SUBJECT: A/S FRIED'S AND AMB NULAND'S MEETING WITH GEORGIAN
PRESIDENT SAAKASHVILI

REF: MUNICH 52

Classified By: CONSUL GENERAL ERIC G. NELSON, REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

¶1. (C) Summary: In a bilateral meeting on the margins of the Munich Security Conference on February 9, EUR A/S Daniel Fried and US Ambassador to NATO Victoria Nuland urged President Mikheil Saakashvili to show leadership in convincing allies that Georgia is ready for a NATO Membership Action Plan (MAP), including through free and fair parliamentary elections. For the U.S., the decision lies now with the most senior levels of the USG, but even U.S. support for MAP might not be sufficient to convince all other NATO allies. Saakashvili noted that USG support for MAP would be welcome, even if unsuccessful. He promised Georgia would continue to pursue electoral reforms and predicted calm parliamentary elections in late May. End Summary.

¶2. (U) President Mikheil Saakashvili of Georgia met A/S Daniel Fried and USNATO Ambassador Victoria Nuland in bilateral talks on the margins of the 44th Munich Security Conference February 9. Saakashvili was accompanied by Daniel Kunin, Special Advisor. Note taker was Kit Traub, USOSCE Vienna.

¶3. (C) A/S Fried told President Saakashvili that the U.S. decision on whether to support a NATO MAP invitation to Georgia is now with the most senior levels of the USG. There remained much resistance to MAP for Georgia among NATO allies. Fried urged Saakashvili to continue working hard to convince Allies and to stay on the reform track at home, overcoming the doubts that had developed during the November demonstrations and the aftermath. Saakashvili warned that a negative decision would surely embolden Russia, which would see it as vindication of negative policies toward Georgia. Further, he predicted that the Georgian public would interpret any postponement by NATO as a complete failure by the Georgian pro-Western leadership.

¶4. (C) President Saakashvili said the Russians now seemed to be backtracking on FM Lavrov's earlier assurances that Russia would not recognize Abkhazia after Kosovo's declaration of independence. A/S Fried said he was not surprised by this Russian behavior) Russia seemed intent on tormenting Georgia by flirting with recognition of Abkhazia. He added that Russia had been told very clearly that recognizing Abkhazia would constitute a major problem in

relations with the U.S. He said the USG would vigorously object to such an irresponsible Russian move in concert with Europe.

¶5. (C) Saakashvili agreed with A/S Fried and Ambassador Nuland about the importance of having a parliamentary election in May that met international standards. Although the attitude among NATO allies toward Georgia since the Presidential elections was improving from its low point in November 2007, Ambassador Nuland said it was clear that Georgia still needed to prove itself to the Europeans. Although the parliamentary elections would occur after the April NATO Summit in Bucharest, A/S Fried emphasized that it was still critical for Georgia to overcome all the shortcomings identified by the experts after the presidential election. Saakashvili said he expected the opposition to engage fully in the campaign, perhaps even in a unified way. He predicted that their involvement and self-interest would inspire them to help keep the atmosphere stable and calm. The separatist conflicts had recently developed in a favorable way in recent weeks: the pro-Georgian alternative leader of South Ossetia, Dmitri Sanakoyev, was increasing his support from the population, and Georgia &has the upper hand on security in Abkhazia (Saakashvili did not elaborate). Saakashvili said he believed the Russians feel "stuck," and therefore will not do anything constructive for a while.

¶6. (U) A/S Fried cleared this cable, which also was coordinated with Embassy Berlin.

¶7. (U) For more information on the 44th Conference and past conferences, visit:"<http://www.securityconference.de>".

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¶8. (U) Previous reporting from Munich is available on our SIPRNET website at www.state.gov/p/eur/munich/.
NELSON